

Critiques of Master-Representations: The Political Dimension of the Canon between the Bible and the Qur'an

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Political theology is at the service of the critique of power representations. On the basis of the examination of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit this paper supports the idea that religion can be considered a rupture in the projection of the subject's claim to power. This becomes especially apparent in the biblical canon and its core, the name of God YHWH and its New Testament equivalent, the Cross. In the final section the paper presents the idea that, by serving as a corrective of strong Christian modes of self-representation, the Qu'ran has to be considered as a revelation for Christians.

Hegel; Bible; Qur'an; Canon; Representation; Phenomenology of Spirit

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Preliminary Remarks

The main thesis of this article is that theology is constituted in the critique of master-representations that is a society's prevailing symbolic order.¹ Its task consists in exposing master-representations and questioning what lies behind them, specifically those that reflect the current political, social, cultural, and noetic frameworks of dominance. Indeed, the institutions, symbols, narratives, and forms of knowledge through which a culture (necessarily!) always represents the subject also 'masks' its 'naked', mortal, and infinitely vulnerable core. Those various representations are forms of projection, whose primary task is to conceal the traumatic core of human existence, which is characterized by man's exposure, vulnerability, and non-categorizability (non-identity). Man is incapable of capturing his own subjectivity in an ultimate, decisive image – neither individually nor collectively. Thus there is no self-conception that could definitively objectify a subject. Each *positive* – in the sense of 'fixed' or 'objectifiable' – representation (i.e. each definitive image of individual or collective subjectivity, as well as each image of the Other) reduces the human to an object and thus to a means of exercising dominance. In this regard, religion is ambivalent, as we will suggest in connection with Hegel's philosophy of religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*² (PoS): On the one hand, the Absolute is the highest representative of and guarantor for all dominant representations. On the other hand, religion is the acknowledgement that the Absolute can no longer be known by representative means, and thus it also marks the end of all representations.³

The question of representation has a decisive significance within the biblical canon. We may of course here think of the prohibition of images in the Old

1 It is in this sense that Johann Baptist Metz discusses prohibition of images in the context of his New Political Theology. Giorgio Agamben suggests in his text "The Time that Remains" [Il tempo che resta], where he discusses the beginning of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, that the "as though [it were] not" (*hos me*) is a central term in Paul, in that he puts successive representations out of play (*rent inopero*). Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2007); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains. A Commentary to the Letters of the Romans*. Transl. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Transl. by A.V. Miller with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

3 Gilles Deleuze devotes a masterful analysis to this circumstance and this ambiguity in his examination of Leibniz and the Baroque – whose primary philosophical representative is Leibniz. Leibnizian metaphysics is simultaneously the construction of a vast, all-embracing system of representation and the ironization of that system. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

Testament, which forbids man from misusing God as the foundation of human power. God's name YHWH – whose inutterability in the canonical texts denotes an interruption – prevents the biblical text from being fully integrated into humanity's existing symbolic orders. In the New Testament the cross is the foremost symbol of this divine name, which represents an extreme horizon of human existence, or limit-case, that is no longer representable, and which expresses a maximum of vulnerability and exposure. Two New Testament writings – which in a particular way subject the entire canon to a re-interpretation, namely the *Gospel of John* and the *Book of Revelation* – take into account this critique of powerful representations, expressed in the name of God and in the cross. John focuses this critique in the encounter between Pilate and Jesus, while Revelation throws the whole aesthetic program of history's merciless, victorious powers into history's lake of fire and, with this separation of historical powers from their forms of representation, reveals a new perspective on the history of the victims of human violence.

One of the founders of the New Political Theology, J.B. Metz, connects the resistance to politically dominant powers that determine history and the critique of the dominant chronological determination of time, i.e. the critique of a "time without finale [*Zeit ohne Finale*]"⁴. In this form of temporality, the victim of history recedes further and further into the realm of forgetting and in the end everything is leveled. Going beyond Metz, one could emphasize that this entropically vanishing chronological time, which proceeds mechanically from moment to moment, amounts to a representation of completely meaningless, nihilistic, subject-less causality. It is no longer an expression of a specific historical power, but is itself power, though it lacks the status of a subject (in the NT a subject-less power would be called 'demonic'). By contrast, the Christian canon sees the dawning of the Eschaton in the *Parusie Christi*, in which chronological time is *sublated* [*aufgehoben*]⁵. The Bible's time is eschatological time. This demonstrates a great sensibility for the fact that the powers of history not only represent themselves in an extensive program of images, but also in a very specific understanding of time. They dominate future insofar they dominate history. Against this, theology has had to address the question 'to whom does time rightfully belong and who is the subject of time?' to the governors since biblical times. To the extent that it is not understood as a mere mechanism, time is always also 'the time of someone', and thus stands in connection with subjects and their histories, and is thus enmeshed in narrative.⁶ Theology thus stands at the intersection of the critique of systems of representation, of experiences of time that

4 Cf. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*.

5 In the German language as used by Hegel, the word "*aufheben*" simultaneously means elevate, conserve and render inoperative.

6 Cf. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*. Transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (3 vol) (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

extinguish subjectivity, and of narratives that dispossess humanity of its time and justify repressive systems of representation.

Christian Theology has to invite our society to understand the biblical canon as an alternative to the ruling powers' narratives, conceptions of time, and aesthetic representations. It does not regard the canon as the product of a distant past, from which we are supposed to draw conclusions for the present. In that sort of approach, the canon would be merely an object of self-reassurance. It would represent a system of meanings through which a seemingly stable, domination-oriented identity could be established. God would thus be a content of the canon, which one could take possession of by reading it. The canon would thus be a reflective surface, mirroring the subject, i. e. a projection of the human. By contrast, the encounter with the canon unleashes an alterity and alienates one's own subjectivity, which demands an open process of translation. Thus the process of becoming a subject [*Subjektwerdung*] in reading the canon does not take place through the collective and individual appropriation of a symbolic world; rather it takes place when the canon and its content – the name YHWH – brings about a displacement of the human subject. The canon therefore is not primarily the content of a reflection, but rather a 'landscape' of affects, narratives, and experiences of the vulnerability of human life, which shatters those images designed to form a protective layer against vulnerability. Thus the canon, under the sign of the alterity of the divine name, permits the reader to inscribe herself into the traumatic core of existence, and to re-enact it, albeit never directly (i. e. in immediate reference). In this way the canon necessarily entails political theology, provided one understands the 'political' as comprising more than the shared identity of a community. Rather, the political begins where there is a fundamental break between the individual and collective identity that structures the subject, i. e. where the Other is manifest in the midst of the self, and the self begins to expose itself to the opening that the Other has made. The subject of the political is constituted in the name of the stranger.

Christian theology, then, remains dependent upon the biblical canon. When the Christian is baptized in Jesus' name, he dons the canon like clothing. His life no longer exists merely within chronological time; he lives rather at the intersection of canonical history and world history. The Christian subject therefore always exists at a transition between times, at the transition between (impossible) succession to the affective space of radical exposure on the cross and current societal challenges. If the canon wants its reader to encounter the glory of God's name YHWH, which in the New Testament is manifest on the cross (i. e. in radical empathy with the sufferer), then the contents of the canon never coincide with the contents of a book. For, if the canon is inspired by the Holy Spirit or is the subject of the Spirit, then it is radically open to re-reading and re-interpretation. In history, the canon's openness is manifest in the fact that it does not exist as *one* text, but rather in a range of a plurality of texts. Perhaps the ultimate expression of this is the current tension between the Bible and the Qur'an, which marks an alterity

within the canon itself. The world of the (Christian) canon – which culminates in God's name and Jesus as its ultimate reference – does not form a self-enclosed world, but includes the possibility of translation. If politics means the affirmation of alterity, and if the divine name YHWH is not directly representable, then the tension between the Bible and the Qur'an could give expression to the political within theology.

These introductory remarks are meant to sketch out the trajectory of this work: it begins with a reference to Hegel, whose thought not only includes a unique synthesis of philosophy, history, Christianity, and politics, but has also shown – in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the precise place where the project of modernity (progress in the consciousness of the subject's freedom) successively encounters its Other. The second step consists in a reflection upon the canon, primarily on its political, epistemological, and temporal implications. Special attention will be paid to the gospel of John, which represents a metatext of the canon. In the third step, I will take into account the fact that the Christian canon points beyond itself and yields a contextualization in its relation to the Qur'an (though also in relation to Talmudic Judaism and the secular world, though these must be left out of account), which is (and must be) decisive for reading the canon. Guiding this trajectory is the conviction that the name of God, YHWH, as the center of the canon, refers to an alterity that becomes perceptible in the vulnerability of life, and it is the task of political theology today to witness and sanctify this vulnerability.

Hegel's Understanding of Religion as the End of Human Projection

1. In the innumerable presentations of the history of philosophy – but also of the philosophy of religion – we often find references to Feuerbach's contention that God is man's own self-projection. These presentations claim that Feuerbach traces Hegelian philosophy, which hypostasizes an absolute Being, back to its anthropological foundations. In fact, this view attributed to Feuerbach expresses the exact opposite of the Hegelian understanding of religion. For Hegel the individual sciences, including anthropology, are primarily human (self-) projections, while human projection becomes shattered in religion. Of course this does not entail that our sciences represent arbitrary and worthless fabrications, but it does mean that they are the expression of social, symbolic orders and the realm of their validity is not completely independent of those orders.

2. The work where Hegel achieves his most profound reflection on the genesis of modern knowledge is the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, Hegel examines the question of how the (modern) subject, who has emerged from its immediate environment, discovers and represents itself in own world which becomes a kind of mirror (a realm of reflection) for its mode encountering its world. Objects of

experience in which the subject seeks to localize itself are: the immediate *sense certainty* of the *pointing out* [*des Zeigens*], the *things* of perception, the world of *laws* of the understanding, of enjoyment [*Genuss*], *work* [*Arbeit*] and the melancholic *longing for the infinite* of self-consciousness, theoretical reason's world of *sciences*, the *erotic*, the *virtuous*, and the icons (Hegel speaks of brand [*Werk*]) of the *poiesis*, the *family*, and the *polis* of intersubjective spirit (i.e. the homogeneous state founded upon a common identity), and finally the subject's claims to validity which manifest themselves in *property*, *education*, and in the *insight* that 'intellectualizes' the world. What characterizes modern knowledge, then, is the way the subject successively accomplishes an increasing abstraction, which goes hand in hand with the virtualization of the world. This abstraction is grounded in the fact that the self cannot retrieve itself in the world, cannot see its exact reflection there, and believes to find itself only in its distance from its environment, i.e. it increasingly seeks to produce itself through this sort of process of distancing. The self reaches the apex of this process upon realizing *absolute freedom* and the terror that accompanies it.

3. According to Hegel, absolute freedom designates the modern subject's capacity to extricate itself from all ties, from the ties of nature and of history. The ego retrieves itself in its negative comportment to its world, i.e. in its process of abstraction, and so the terror is nothing other than the active, radical abstraction from all concrete content, which, as a final consequence, expresses itself in the total annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of all contents. The ego discovers itself through its radical lack of 'place' [*Ortlosigkeit*], i.e. it is a nothing in relation to the world it encounters. The only 'place' left to it is the *nothing* of negative freedom (i.e. the absence of content and alterity). Thus Hegel holds that modernity, which began with the self's dawning awareness of its opposition to the (social and natural) world, ends in an all-embracing *nihilism*, which goes hand in hand with a freedom that suffers under a terroristic pressure to turn everything into 'nothing.' Today one could connect this to the ever-expanding virtualization of all spheres of life. What characterizes the virtual world is that there are no limits on how it is available to and subjugated by the subject, as there is no actual object there that does not stem from the self. As a result, the contents of the virtual world are arbitrarily replaceable and detached from real history.

The decisive factor here is that, according to Hegel, the modern ego has also negated the historical genesis of its own origin. Hence the (conservative or even fascistic) attempt to give the ego a fixed historical identity (e.g. in the Christian heritage of the West or the historical heritage of a nation) leads directly to virtuality, since an unbroken recourse to tradition is no longer possible. Modernity therefore implies a radical loss of tradition. However, we must emphasize that in Hegel's view, the traditional forms of knowledge have not simply disappeared, but have rather been sublated [*aufgehoben*]. History then retains a decisive significance, although a direct recourse to heritage to find one's own identity is no longer possible.

4. In the PoS Hegel fixes two further levels to absolute freedom in the chapter on spirit, namely *morality* [*Moralität*] in Kant's sense and *conscience* [*Gewissen*]. One could then say that in Hegel (prior to Nietzsche!) morality is inhibited terror, while conscience is its internalization. In any case, what is noteworthy here is that, according to Hegel, the genesis of modern morality is inextricably linked to the experience of terror. The greatness of modern morality lies in its aptness for general thought, which arises from a process of abstraction. It is no longer tied to concrete circumstances (the polis, family, culture, etc.), but is universally valid. Its terror is that it represents (together with the conscience as internalized morality) the final form of the subject's claim to validity. The subject seeks to locate itself in its moral claim to validity, and places the entire world under its judgment. According to Hegel, the modern world is Kant's world, since it refers back to a permanent process of judgment (especially in the sciences and morality, though today it reaches down to the most banal activities, such as 'likes' on Facebook), which, for the subject, remains its final place of self-discovery.

5. At the end of the chapter on conscience, which also marks the end of the chapter on spirit and thus the first major part of PoS, a radical rupture occurs: the judging conscience attains the experience that its own place, maintained the absolute place in the world, is a merely contingent place. The conscience acknowledges the contingency of its own standpoint and sees how much it too lives according to the conditions and contexts that have determined its judgment. Through this knowledge it is able to forgive the contingency of the Other. In the act of forgiveness, however, the subject experiences that this forgiving would once again only be a reflection of its own claim to validity if the subject as a sovereign were to forgive the Other. Therefore, according to Hegel's understanding, the ego can only forgive what already has been forgiven. Thus it experiences in its act something that precedes it [*eine Vorgängigkeit*], to which it can only respond. The judged Other disappears with the experience of the subject's own contingency as a surface of projection. The subject can then no longer find itself through its projections and representations, but instead paradoxically only by losing them. The ego constitutes itself by losing itself (cf. Matt 16:26), i.e. in the separation from and displacement of itself.

6. For Hegel, religion marks the loss of projection surfaces, which the world/the Other had served as up to that point. The ego experiences itself in his Other, without being able to find any ultimate representation of this Other. The Absolute then is that sphere which is no longer representable, and can no longer be subjugated to the self and its representations. Religion and its world of divinity thus symbolize the stages of the ego's displacement.⁷ Hence deities are not projections of humanity, but are rather expressions of a fundamental loss, namely the loss of

7 Kierkegaard's distinction between aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres points in the same direction as Hegel's distinctions. The aesthetic sphere and the ethical stance towards the world contain a mirroring of the subject that only religion breaks through.

self-conception. This is also the reason why, for Hegel, religious symbols are inseparably bound to death.⁸ Death shatters the levels of human reflection and resists any direct representation: the 'I' cannot be present at its own death.

I cannot exhaustively list each figure from the chapter on religion in Hegel's PoS: symbolizations of the ego's loss of self-conception include, e.g. the animal of *Totemism*, in which man encounters the animal's strangeness, which outstrips conceptual thought. Further, Hegel calls the *pyramid* a sign of death, and he claims that in the *Olympic games*, the physical body in motion refers to a second, non-representable body. Even the *statues of Greek gods* do not directly represent the self, but point to a strangeness, which expresses the suffering of the artist (considered as the people's representative). We find in *language* the deepest symbolism of the loss expressed in religion. Human language does not depict the world, but rather represents a break between the subject and its world. As a speaker, man is the death of every immediacy; words do not refer (directly) to things but rather to one another, i. e. to the endless openness of meanings, which is manifest in each sentence. In place of the world of representable objects, we have the infinite referential context of a linguistic system of signs. In other words: in language, the representable world is *sublimated* [*aufgehoben*].

For this reason language is the death of the object. We encounter the last two linguistic stages in (ancient) tragedy and (ancient) comedy, which know that death underlies language. *Tragedy* is the echo of a world destined to fall into death and decay because its immediacy has become lost in language. The most radical level is the *comedic consciousness*: it dissolves humanity's symbolic world and its traumatic core with laughter. Thus Hegel deciphers all symbolizations of religion – from light, to the animal, all the way up to the language of tragedy – as masks of death. What remains is not the nihilistic nothing in which the self could find itself reflected again, but the radical contingency of being, which transcends every representation. This prepares the way to a sensoriness that no longer functions as an image (and thus projection) of an object, but of the Absolute, i.e. loosened from every concept and every imagination, this sensoriness refers only to pure contingency itself.

7. God's incarnation in revealed religion (Christianity) – which Hegel positions after comedic consciousness – corresponds to the comedic gesture. A contingency is manifest in Jesus, which outstrips every representation and every human conception, i. e. a sensoriness, which is no longer representable and can no longer be captured reflectively. This phenomenon finds its most profound expression in the cross and the connected phrase, "God has died".⁹ In this place, the Absolute as the guarantor of a powerful system of representation has died; paradoxically this also

8 Thus we can also find Heidegger's figure of "being towards death" in Hegel's chapter on religion, at least with respect to content. Heidegger introduces this figure in order to criticize the hypothesis of the ego's absolute self-reflectivity.

9 cf. Hegel, PoS, 455.

includes death (understood as absolute nothingness) as the ultimate representation of nihilism, in which modernity is reflected. Thus *all* representations have “died”, all representations in which the subject sought to conceal its infinite vulnerability and contingency.

8. Hegel criticizes revealed religion for remaining in the *form of representation*.¹⁰ With the term ‘representation’ he is not deprecating the sensory aspect of religion, to which he would then oppose a supersensory philosophy of pure cognition. What Hegel does criticize is the religious community’s attempt to defang the contingency that came to consciousness on the cross, by grasping that event as something that belongs entirely to the past. At the beginning of the *PoS*, sense certainty failed to grasp its truth – the contingency of the sensory – insofar as it sought to write down this truth.¹¹ Even Christianity cannot cling to the truth of the Absolute by attempting to represent it in writing. Properly understood, the biblical canon is not the preservation of a past event for posterity; it is rather the expression and beginning of a displacement process in which the reader is constituted as a subject. The subject is a response to the unrepresentable Other; it experiences a displacement in the Other and in this way the subject is the transition from “itself” [*Es selbst*] to “itself as Other” [*Es als Anderes*]. One could also say that the self is the guest of an otherness, and like the guest it can never stay by itself.¹² Even mundane, human speech, as we have suggested, is not strictly denotative here since it is the echo of this displacement. The canon, and with it the Absolute, signify precisely that sphere in which the subject is displaced from its self-reference into the open, where it is exposed to a radical vulnerability and contingency. Hegel’s absolute knowledge, with which he concludes the *PoS*, has released itself from self-referential representations. It no longer attempts to compensate for this loss through religious symbols, but rather to see the reference to the Absolute itself in this loss. In the wake of Hegel then, one can only believe unconditionally in a God who is *not* immediately present.¹³ The canon then manifests Hegel’s intention, in that the reference to God’s name YHWH occurs in the shattering of human conceptions. Thus the canon becomes the political document of an individual and collective process of becoming a subject, which is constituted by suspending all final representations.

10 Hegel, *PoS*, 478. In the translation of Miller it is used the word ‘picture-thought’ for ‘representation’.

11 Cf. Hegel, *PoS*, 60.

12 Cf. Hans Dieter Bahr, *Die Sprache des Gastes. Eine Metaethik* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1994).

13 Cf. Bonhoeffer’s elegant phrase: “There is not a God who is there [*Einen Gott, den es gibt, gibt es nicht*]” in: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, DBW VIII, 514 f. [Author’s translation -Tr].

Thoughts on the Political (and Temporal) Dimension of the Canon

The Seventh Day and the Celebratory Beginning of Time (Gen 1:1–2,4)

In the following section I will examine a few crucial pericopes from the canon in order to briefly analyze the theme announced here: specifically, the initial passages of Genesis (Gen 1–3), which state the central theme of the Bible, and then Ex 34:6, which offers a reflection on the divine name (where it only appears in the doubly asserted form YHWH YHWH). Finally, I will consider some ideas from the Gospel of John (first John 1:1; then John 19:4 f. as a decisive passage on Jesus' path to the cross; and John 20:1–18, which forms a kind of conclusion before the epilogue-like passages John 20:19–30 and Jn 21). Indeed, as we have suggested, this gospel constitutes a commentary and metatext on the entire canon.

The narrative of creation in seven days (Gen 1:1–2, 4a) revolves around the theme of time: *day one* stands at the beginning of time, with its three dimensions¹⁴ of the being-towards-death of the evening, the interruption of death at night, and the morning's renewed creation; in the middle of time there stands the *fourth day*, which is the time of celebration and the curtailing [*Depotenzierung*] of life-threatening forces¹⁵; the *seventh day* stands at the end (or also at the beginning and in the center – see below) as eschatological and celebratory excess. Together they circumscribe the essence of time and therefore of creation as well.¹⁶ The seventh day, in opposition to the other days of creation, is not tied to any work of creation, but rather accompanies the other days as a 'guest.' The term guest suggests itself here because the guest can neither belong to what is one's 'own' (the subject)¹⁷ nor can it be pushed out as belonging to the Other. Rather, it removes itself from the self-other dichotomy and, in its non-belonging, it stands at the center of the 'own' and generates a fundamental, non-occupiable openness of the 'own.' The seventh day symbolizes the unrepresentable openness of time, which it first constitutes. Insofar as the seventh day (Saturday, Sabbath, the sixth day plus one) is transferred to the following day (Sunday) in Christianity, one could say that the re-

14 The formula "it was evening and then it was morning" is not arbitrary: Here the rhythm of time, which also guides the liturgy, begins with the evening as a symbol of mortal time, and proceeds through the interruption of night (symbol of death) in hope for the new creation. This tripartite symbolism is also the background for the resurrection on the *third day*. Cf. Erich Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983).

15 The sun and moon, symbols of what had then been the superpowers Sun and Moon, are integrated into the order of creation and are thus curtailed.

16 The theme of time structures the whole pericope (Gen 1:1–2,4a), insofar as beginning, middle, and end are dedicated to that theme. Days 2–3 and 5–6 deal with the theme of land and space and are embedded in the structure of time.

17 Cf. Bahr, *Die Sprache des Gastes*.

sultant eighth day (the sixth day plus one plus one) confirms the excess of the seventh day (insofar as this doubling in the biblical sense signifies a celebratory emphasis!). Furthermore, the eighth day gives expression to how the last day coincides with the first day – also Sunday – which is the basis of time. Thus a celebratory excess is inscribed in world time, which prevents the world/time from coinciding with itself. Creation therefore cannot be chronologically delimited or represented. From a biblical standpoint, creation ‘aims’ at the celebratory excess of time. Given that this is an explicit theme at the beginning of the canon, we can interpret the entire Bible as a question concerning the genesis of divine celebration. This means that we must always see all of the canon’s political statements in light of the possibility of celebratory excess, which sublimates/sublates (*hebt auf*) the entirety of world events (symbolized in the six days).

The Tree of Knowledge as Both Centre and Open Space (Gen 2:4–3:24)

The central question concerns the content of the celebration, in which God expresses himself, insofar as God is the singular representation of the seventh day. We find our first clue in the first section of the Bible (Gen 1:1–2,4a) itself: it is often said (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) God sees that what he has created is good. Thus there is a celebration of creation’s goodness. But in what does this consist?

The second creation narrative that follows the first pericope provides an answer. Here we must pay close attention to space. Gen 2 represents it as a garden, full of life and shade-giving trees, in the middle of which stands the tree of life (which represents the oriental deity as the life-giving sun, shining over the whole garden). More precisely it is:

“Out of the ground the LORD [YHWH] God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden(,) and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen 2:9).

It is striking how the *tree of knowledge* is mentioned next to the *tree of life*. Its location remains indefinite, or is of a double nature: on the one hand, we can read the ‘and’ as creating a parallel with the tree of life. In that case, we would have two trees in the middle of the garden, namely the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. On the other hand, it is possible to read the sentence as leaving the tree of knowledge’s location open, or incapable of being inserted into the overall coordinate system of the garden. Specifically that holds if we read the ‘and’ as both an addition to the trees generally and to the tree of life specifically. In this case we would have a wonderful garden with the tree of life in the center and beyond that, in an indeterminate location, the tree of knowledge. A third option would be to leave the passage in its ambiguity: the tree of knowledge would then be both in the center (parallel to or coinciding with the tree of life) and on the periphery, and as

such the static space would become a dynamic one. The center would then be marked by an openness and a displacement, which make it a center in the first place. On this reading, the tree of knowledge would be the spatial equivalent to the (temporal) seventh day: it would be in the center of the garden without belonging directly to it, and in this parallel (and movement!) it would represent the sphere of the divine, which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent to being.

Nakedness, Vulnerability, and Mortality

According to Gen 2:16 f., man was permitted to eat of the tree of life, but not of the tree of knowledge, since he will die on the day he eats of it. Many have interpreted this passage to mean that man only came out of a primordial unity with God by transgressing the divine prohibition, and thus in a certain sense had grown up and became man in the genuine sense through disobedience. This argument receives further emphasis in the sentence from Gen 2:25, which has become so potent in Christian history: "The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame." The key to understanding the tree of knowledge is in fact nakedness. This is the first concretization of what knowledge means, since immediately after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge "the eyes of both of them [man and woman] were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen 3:7).

Contrary to the usual interpretations, the man and the woman are not children, and by no means are they asexual children. Rather, we are dealing with adults who can understand a prohibition, and this adulthood is even necessary to explicitly call the two people 'man' and 'woman.' If one considers the *Book of Psalms*, or even the culture of the Orient up to the present, then it should strike one immediately that, for the Oriental man, being exposed is even worse than being killed. Occidental strategies for self-immunization do not work there and therefore the worst curse in oriental cultures is to be placed under the (judging, dominant, scornful) gaze of the Other and to feel naked there.

On the other hand, if Adam and Eve are not ashamed to be naked before one another in paradise, then that is because they are not placed under the ('pornographic') gaze of the Other. Their nakedness is not the result of a forced disrobement, which concealed an unbearable nothingness; their nakedness is protected by a withdrawal [*Entzogenheit*] (which we must not think of positivistically), which is precisely what the non-occupiable tree of knowledge symbolizes. The Fall consists in the fact that the sphere of openness, as expressed by the tree of knowledge, is occupied by the will of dominance. Thus, in place of the withdrawing openness, the will to totality steps in, which corresponds to the all-knowing and all-seeing gaze, which extinguishes the Other in its otherness, so that 'nothing' remains. If the nakedness of paradise was an expression of mutual reference and vulnerable openness, then nakedness after the Fall is the limitless exposure to the

isolated gaze's insatiable appetite (for invulnerable dominance). Through this gaze, the unbearable nothing (which must be clothed) takes the place of the original withdrawal.

This demonstrates the two dimensions of recognizing nakedness: on the one hand it concerns the acknowledgement of what is good in paradise, in the sense of a mutual, unconditional connectedness in the mutual openness of the body (and thus of vulnerability!), which is pure opening. On the other hand, through the Fall, the knowledge of evil arises as total and totalitarian knowledge, and thus as unlimited power over the Other.

The 'Bet' between God and the Serpent over the Goodness of Creation

God asserts that death, i. e. the separation from the tree of life, is the consequence of taking the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17). In contrast, we have in the dialogue between the serpent and Eve:

"He [the serpent] asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden'?" The woman answered the snake: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.'" But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.'" (Gen 3:1b–5)

What is immediately striking about this dialogue is that the tree of knowledge – which initially had no clear location – is now placed at the center of Eve's desire (she now speaks explicitly of the tree that is in the middle of the garden). This desire is embodied in the serpent, which traditionally portrays the liar *par excellence* due to its claim that man will not die after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Upon closer examination, however, the situation is more complex: for the serpent's second statement, that after eating the fruit man's eyes would be opened, is true. This casts the first statement in another light: God does separate man from the tree of life, but obviously this death is not intended as a punishment for a transgression – we immediately receive proof that God still cares for man, as man receives clothing to protect him from the gaze of the Other (Gen 3:21) – since death rather serves as a tragic salvation of man from himself. It prevents man from becoming absolutely omnipotent, from becoming invulnerable, and thus prevents him from falling completely into nothingness. Death prevents man from having himself and the Other completely at his disposal. However there is still, as we will see, an attempt on the part of man to overcome death. Man thus enters into a rivalry with God, in which the decisive question is whether the world is entirely at man's disposal, or whether it still retains an element of withdrawal and inaccessibility.

The next pericope about Cain and Abel concerns death and the attempt to overcome it. Eve solemnly proclaims the birth of Cain, the firstborn (Gen 4:1), because Cain's birth has forged a genealogical chain (father-son), which in a patriarchal society is the primary way of achieving immortality: the name lives on in the descendant, who continues to represent the image of the self.

From what has been said, it is clear what the goodness of creation – which God proclaimed – consists in: its vulnerability and mortality, i. e. in not having to be all-powerful and untouchable. The celebration then is the manifestation of God, which does not suppress death, but celebrates the mortal creation with which God has made his covenant. Death, however, is not to be understood as a transition to nothingness; rather it refers to a final inaccessibility [*Unverfügbarkeit*] of one's own self and of the Other.

The Prophet Abel and Speaking the Divine Name

While Cain symbolizes genealogy and thus the quest for immortality, God stands on the side of the mute Abel, the righteous (or justified) one (Heb 11:4), in whose name we hear the 'breeze', i. e. transitoriness, mortality, and weakness.¹⁸ Abel stands at the margin, just like the seventh day and the tree of knowledge. The parallelism with the first two figures becomes stronger with the arrival of Seth, the third son who takes Abel's place and whose name (lit.: *substitute*) points to the function of living on in the name of the victims of domination and claims to power, symbolized in Abel.

We have two parallel worlds then: on the one hand we have the genealogy of Cain and thus Being as the continuation and mirroring of the self. Cain is the progenitor of (among other things) cities and weapon industries, whose function is self-security. On the other hand we have the line of Seth, which also gives rise to Jesus (cf. Lk 3:23–28). In this line, existence is representation [*Stellvertretung*] of the weak and the marginalized. Where the seventh day and the tree of knowledge inscribe a moment of openness into time and space, Seth inscribes himself directly into the open place of the murdered, the victim: not in order to occupy their place, but rather to carry on their memory. It gives Adam's genealogy meaning in that it does not express a direct genealogy. The time of the Seth line is the time of the response to and responsibility for the silent call of the victim.

Gen 4:26 states in a small note that "To Seth a son was born and he named him Enosh" and closes with this verse: "At that time people began to invoke the LORD [YHWH] by name." The name YHWH is not directly utterable and so it is not vocalized in the Bible, which makes this note all the more fascinating. The

18 Cf. The wonderful interpretation of Klara Butting, "'Abel steh auf!' – Die Geschichte von Kain und Abel – und Schet (Gen 4,1–26)", in: *Bibel und Kirche* 58 (2003), p. 16–19.

name Enosh indicates mortal, vulnerable man. Therefore the divine name YHWH resounds in the form of the vulnerable.

The Divine Name YHWH (Ex 34:6 f.): God as the Predicate of YHWH

Even more central than Ex 3, in which YHWH reveals himself as God of the exodus, who leads his people out of slavery, is the pericope Ex 32–34, with Ex 34:6 f. at its centre:

“So the LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed: The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity, continuing his love for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but bringing punishment for their parents’ wickedness on children and children’s children to the third and fourth generation!”

G. Borgonovo attempts to demonstrate that Ex 32–34 is at the centre of the Torah and thus of the entire Tanakh or Bible.¹⁹ What is important here at any rate is that Ex 34:6 is the only time in the entire Bible that the divine name is doubled, thus expressing a very special ceremonial, celebratory quality.

The context of the above-quoted passage is Israel’s breach of the covenant when they worshipped the golden calf; in doing so they ceased to be a people of exodus and accordingly YHWH blot them out of his book (Ex 32:33). After all this, the ensuing dialogue between YHWH and Moses does not conclude with a total break from foregoing history, but with YHWH’s renewed covenant, with a partial, verbal allusion (“you have found mercy in my eyes”, “the passing by of YHWH”) to the promise YHWH made to Abraham in Genesis 18 of a descendant (and thus a transformation of history into a history of salvation). The ‘*passing by*’ of YHWH’s glory [*kabod*] and (forgiving) goodness enables a revelation of the divine name, though it remains impossible to look upon YHWH directly (Ex 33:23). YHWH presents himself as a verbal event, which is interpreted through various predicates, and these predicates become meaningful only in the performance of the divine name, since they do not represent static attributes. The tetragram indicates a transcendence of every representable content and every external perception. Even the determination ‘God’ is a predicate and functions as the first reference to the divine name, which is followed by the further determinations: ‘merciful,’ ‘keeper of covenants,’ but also ‘ready to bear guilt.’ In this most central place of the Bible, ‘God’ is not the subject of the event, but a reference to the more fundamental name YHWH. In his YHWH-being, God sublates (*hebt auf*) the guilt-ridden past and acts out God’s presence in the

19 Gianantonio Borgonovo, *Torah e storiografie dell'Antico Testamento* (Torino: Eledici, 2012).

renewal of the document of the covenant (Ex 34:1.28)²⁰; the result of Israel's faithfulness is the path to the Promised Land.

We also encounter the priority of the divine name in the New Testament, e. g. in Mt 28:19, where the mandate is to baptize people in the *name* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The highest Biblical profession of faith does not lie in the statement "YHWH is God" or "God is YHWH", but rather in the statement "YHWH (is) YHWH", which expresses the verbal dynamics of the divine name, which exceeds all predication. It is also on this basis that we must interpret the central profession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4 f.:

"Hear O Israel! The Lord [YHWH] our God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength."

We must not understand YHWH's uniqueness as either a numerical one or as God's unity; rather it pertains to the singularity of the name, which transcends every finite predication and points to the uniqueness of the relation of love that underlies the event of the covenant. What is of crucial significance for political theology here, is that this name is linked to a text (a canon), which suspends the ruling powers and their reference system.

The Torah as an Alternative Textualization of the World

We can understand the Torah as a textualization [*Textwerdung*] of the world. This means the transformation of time and its subjectless procession into an affectively connoted system of meaning, with the name YHWH standing at the center of it, which is manifest as faithfulness to the covenant. The biblical text does not narrate Israel's past as a reference to a 'time that once was'; rather it re-enacts that history with an eye to its future. It is therefore not a remembrance of a past that has disappeared, but rather the celebratory remembrance of the seventh day, i. e. the remembrance of YHWH's future, who, as the God of the Fathers, is the one in whose name the exodus of the old symbolic forms (and their repressive structures) can be re-enacted. Even the temple, which at the time of the Torah's composition either lay in ruins or was a mere shadow of its former glory, shifts to the level of a text (Ex 25–30 and Ex 35–40). In this process, the entire canon can be understood as re-enacting an alternative history that displays its own dynamics: in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Old Testament, the development proceeds from the *Torah* and its

20 Contrary to his announcement, YHWH no longer describes the stone tablets of the covenant after the breaking of the covenant (Ex 34:1). Thus it is now up to Moses and Israel to re-enact YHWH's name in faithfulness to the covenant.

promise of a homeland (first part)²¹ to the second part, the *prophets* (*Nebiim*): in these writings events take place at several levels. First, the narrative thread that began with entering the promised land (Jos), ends with the catastrophes of the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian exile (2 Kgs). These traumatic events receive a fourfold commentary by Isaiah (central theme: the destruction of the temple and its re-establishment in the end times), Jeremiah (covenant, breaking of the covenant, and renewal of the covenant), Ezekiel (the holiness of the name YHWH) and the twelve books of the prophets, to be read together as a unity (central theme: God's name YHWH and YHWH's day). Backward-looking and forward-looking passages overlap here, and the geographic references shift from the promised land to a universal – or eschatological – level (Ez 40–48). Ultimately the prophets leave the chronological-referential framework behind them – knowing, that a trauma can never be directly addressed – and thus make it possible to open new perspectives on the past (and its victims), without undoing the past. The decisive point here is that there is no more history independent of the text, to which the text refers. Rather, the (prophetic) text creates Israel's history anew, in that it establishes a system of symbols that serves as an alternative to the ancient Eastern reign, which no longer revolves around the temporal forces of nature or the historical acts of super powers, but rather narrates the hopes of the demolished Israel, which are bound to the name YHWH. Consequently, the name of God is placed in the center by the last prophetic commentary – the book of the twelve prophets –, whose two main motifs are directly taken up in Mt (see above).²² A celebratory re-enactment of the name YHWH takes place in the final part of the canon: in the *Ketubim*. In *Job* they follow the path of man's suffering, the *Psalms* address the canon's history to YHWH, the *Megillot* (the five feast scrolls, which are read for Israel's greatest feasts) translates the name YHWH into a celebratory event, and, finally, there is the paradigmatic reconstitution of God's chosen people in the recapitulation of the universal history (in the books of Dan, Ezr, Neh, Chr), which guides the reader's attention to the temple, where YHWH's glory has its seat (2 Chr 36:23).

YHWH's day, as the seventh/eighth day, on which YHWH hallows his name, is described in the New Testament as Jesus' path to the cross. YHWH's glory – which had its residence in the cover of the Ark of the Covenant in the temple (as the place of the forgiveness of sins), and which is the center of salvation history – appears in the figure of Jesus, specifically on the cross, which suspends all other

21 In this part Moses and Israel will not enter the land, but it remains in view as a promised future.

22 The day of YHWH is interpreted in Jesus' genealogy. This not only recapitulates the main stages of the salvation history of Israel – in its '3x14 names' schema, with the stations Abraham-David/ David-Exile/ Exile-Jesus – but also sets out its own specific design since the last genealogical series only mentions 13 names; the fourteenth designates YHWH's openness and his *parousia*, which structure the whole of history.

symbols of power, including the natural cosmos. It is from this point of view that we must understand (e.g.) the apocalyptic insertions in the synoptic gospels: the cosmic order collapses, preparing the way for Jesus' words (cf. Mk 13:31), which in being read reconstitutes the world.

The *Johannine writings* offer a particularly striking example of the transformation of history (in the sign of the cosmos and its dominant powers) into text (in the sign of the cross), and as we will see, they have a special place in the canon. The *Book of Revelation*, as the final writing of the Christian canon, casts the representations of the historical powers into the lake of fire, so that history – dressed up in the iconography of its conquering powers – records and displays the victims of those powers, symbolizing the victims in the cross and the slaughtered lamb. Jesus, as the wounded sacrificial lamb, holds the key to history in his hand, as his body becomes an affective space (the space of the biblical canon) where empathy for the wounded can gain expression. In this sense, the cosmos is transformed into a textual body, i.e. into the biblical canon, which functions as the body of history's victims, and which liturgically re-stages that history. We must place special emphasis on the fact that while the last scripture of the Christian canon, the *Book of Revelation*, exhibits an intertextual collage of quotes from the rest of the (Old Testament) canon, it never quotes directly from the Tanakh. Under the impression of the cross, the text shifts: it is transformed into a liturgical response²³ to the reversal of history that takes place in the text (from rulers to their victims), in which the being-with and presence of the name YHWH makes itself manifest. In this form of address, not only is profane history cast into the lake of fire, but the entire biblical canon undergoes a displacement,²⁴ since the denotative word must transform itself into a performative liturgy in order to gain access to the open body of a universal affective space, which stands under the sign of exposure and total dedication.

Ecce Homo! The Apocalypse of Power and YHWH's Glory

"Once more Pilate went out and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, 'Behold, the man!'" (John 19:4 f.)

23 Accordingly, this liturgy closes with an amen, followed by a universal blessing as the last word of the Bible (Rev 22:21).

24 It is also fitting in this picture that the Book of Revelation seems to be the only ancient writing that deliberately incorporates grammatical errors, above all with respect to the name of God. This makes it clear that in the encounter with the cross as the place of YHWH's glory, language breaks down.

A process of re-reading the Tanakh, but also of the (synoptic) gospels, begins with the Gospel of John.²⁵ The prologue to John cites the beginning of the Tanakh, while the end of John (John 20:17)²⁶ discusses the ascension to the Father, which the end of the Tanakh alludes to (2 Chr 36:23). Three further observations are crucial here:

a. The *logos* of the beginning not only refers to the word of creation in Genesis or to the Greek *Logos*, in which the world becomes legible, but also to the Torah²⁷ or Tanakh. Thus at the beginning was the word of the canon, which is interpreted in Jesus (Jn 1:18). Jesus is manifest as “God-is” (John 1:18); his coming discloses the name of YHWH and thus the canon. Whoever reads John is invited to encounter Jesus in reading the canon (John 1:37–39).²⁸ The canon leads the reader to John and from there to the cross. The genuine creation of the world takes place in the reading of John, which culminates in the way to the cross. By following Jesus to the cross YHWH’s glory becomes visible.

b. The Holy Spirit’s mission promises those who believe in Jesus to accomplish greater works than Jesus had (John 14:12). These greater works cannot mean a greater number of resurrections, or turning more water into wine. Rather, the greater work is the Spirit-inspired re-reading of the canon, which John (or the beloved disciple, who is the paradigmatic reader of the canon) brings to paradigmatic expression. This gives the Holy Spirit – the ‘other’ support – a precise location: just as Jesus is the *Logos* of the canon insofar as his path accomplishes YHWH’s “passing by”, the Holy Spirit is the key to reading the canon, the ultimate experience of which is the vision of YHWH’s glory on the cross.

c. We must also take John’s position into account. It not only divides Lucan double-work, but finds itself in the fourth place of the gospels. This is surprising since John, which according to tradition was written by an apostle (in contrast to Mark and Luke, written by apostle’s disciples), should be in the first or second position in the New Testament. Situating John in the fourth place, *between* the two related books of Luke and Acts, seems to not only express that John is a re-reading

25 Without a knowledge of at least one of the other synoptic gospels, John would be incomprehensible, and John’s position as the fourth gospel also indicates that it is a continuation of the other three.

26 In *Tempo e Dio* Appel attempts to show that the following passages already introduce the epilogue of John, insofar as Mary Magdalene is not only the first witness of the Risen One, but with her the way to the cross also initiates the paradigmatic re-reading of the canon. Thus she is the first concrete embodiment of the beloved disciple. The following passages, as an epilogue, reflect once again the true view on Jesus and history. Cf. Kurt Appel, *Tempo e Dio* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2018).

27 Cf. for example Ps 119, where *Logos* means the Torah (or the Tanakh).

28 The invitation to see where Jesus lives primarily refers to seeing the canon as Jesus’ actual dwelling. One of Jesus’ two students remains anonymous so the reader can find herself in that figure.

of the synoptic gospels, but also the fact that this gospel does not sit on the same level as the other canonical writings. It is located on a meta-level (like how the seventh/eighth day evokes a meta-level, in contrast to the six days of labor, as it opens and transcends the chronological order), where the canon – and therefore the entire history of salvation – is subjected to a new interpretation in the Spirit.

“Seeing” is the crucial keyword in the Johannine writings. The Gospel of John and Revelation (and 1 John as well) concern adequately seeing the real, a gaze which becomes manifest in the vision of YHWH's glory (John 1:14), considered as the purpose of history. Thus the task to see the (vulnerable) reality is connected to perceiving both Jesus, the lamb of God (John 1:29–35; Rev 5:6), and seeing the history that will have been (Revelation). The Lamb is a sign that henceforth, Jesus, in his devotion and radical openness to the Other, will be representative of the victim as the subject of history. John 19:5 offers another crucial passage where the author invokes seeing, as he explicitly directs the gaze once again to YHWH's glory.

Usually this verse, which is situated in the context of Jesus' trial before Pilate, is translated so that the Roman governor asks others to look upon the tortured Jesus. While this translation is not completely impossible, it finds little theological or grammatical support in the text. Rather, in an act of self-revelation, it is Jesus who asks an adequate way of seeing for humanity in that *he* speaks the words “Ecce Homo”. He turns our eyes to the cynicism of the apparatuses of power, which have condemned him to death even while recognizing his innocence. The real representation of the Absolute is not Pilate, the representative of the Empire, but the tortured man: it is now the victims who represent the history that the powerful have written.

“Ecce Homo”, perhaps more than any other scene, offers a haunting display of what Hegel captured in theory, when after the comedic consciousness comes the incarnation of God as the unification of sense certainty and absolute spirit. “Ecce Homo” is sense certainty as absolute knowledge, since all the trappings of power have fallen away, and power is revealed in its naked brutality. That YHWH's glory is revealed in the tortured man is the highest paradox and innermost moment of history. Only a vision that surpasses immediate sensoriness – which would be voyeurism – can recognize the world in its vulnerable contingency; this would require a seeing that perceives the infinite vulnerability of being (which emerges in its most radical form in that species of torture that is capable of delaying and, in a certain sense, mastering death) as the most profound sensory and cognitive experience. Whoever sees the world in this way no longer subdues the world under his own will for dominion. He deciphers history as a killing machine that the historical powers have installed, though these powers prove unable to rob their victims of the glory of YHWH.

The whole context and ‘performance’ of this passage is of decisive importance for the question of political theology²⁹: Pilate (the representative of Roman dominance) and Jesus are mutually exclusive and yet inseparably linked antipodes. Jesus is the parody of the expected Messiah. His messianic power does not display itself in a new empire, but rather in the ironic reversal [*Ironisierung*] of (Roman) rule, whose power he suspends upon the cross. Pilate, by contrast, attempts to make an ironic-reversal of messianism from a position of power with an act of writing³⁰, not understanding, that Jesus’ Kingdom, which he regards in mock irony, will have accomplished an ironic reversal of his own rule.

The question of sight is crucial in the encounter with the Resurrected One: when Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ first witness (*Apostola Apostolorum*), went to Jesus’ grave, she first encounters a gardener (Jn 20:15). That’s because her gaze is directed at the hoped for return of paradise, in which God (as gardener) has planted a garden. At first she does not see that “Jesus is”. This passage is not about a false identification brought about by Mary Magdalene’s problems with her vision, or Jesus camouflaging himself; rather it concerns the steps Mary must take from confessing her belief in God the creator (the gardener) to her belief in Jesus’ YHWH-being (the words “I am” or the words “Jesus is” refer to YHWH’s self-revelation in Ex 3 and Ex 34). As a consequence, Mary is not allowed to hold on to Jesus, for Jesus’ YHWH-being is connected with his journey to the Father,³¹ which in turn is inseparably bound to the ascension of his disciples to this Father. The Gospel of John artfully connects the subject of Mary with the subject of Jesus in 20:17 (“I am going [up] to...”), in that he leaves open whether it is Mary or Jesus who is the subject of the announcement to the disciples. This not only indicates an unsurpassable intimacy between Jesus and Mary, who are one in the ascension, but enacts the task of ascension with which the Tanakh ends. On the one hand, looking back, this task completes the recapitulation of the canon, and on the other hand, looking forward, this task is the ascent to the cross, in which the canon becomes legible in its ultimate truth. In doing so, Jesus binds his existence as a reference to the name YHWH (which becomes concrete history in his journey to the Father), to a corresponding reception, which the reader of the canon must keep alive.

History, in the sense of the canon, is therefore not primarily related to what is past; rather it is primarily related to the way to the cross, or to the opening of a common, affective space, which must remain open to the wounded and the

29 On this point I must openly thank Marlene Deibl for sharing hints and insights with me.

30 Cf. (Jn 19:19), which refers to Pilate’s inscription upon the cross: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

31 Here it cannot be the case that, after his resurrection, Jesus lingers on earth for a while and then goes to the Father, for his place is with the Father. It is crucial that Jesus connects his path to the Father to the path of his disciples.

murdered. As a symbol of devotion, exposure, and vulnerability, the cross opens up a new friendship that reaches into the innermost cells of the body, while simultaneously suspending the representation of one's proper name (the subject of Mary becomes the subject of Jesus and vice versa). The (individual and collective) subject of the reader of the canon exists *between* his own history (her proper name) and the divine name YHWH³²; thus it does not exist within itself, but is radically open to the Other.

We also encounter this structure in the Pauline doctrine of justification: the decisive idea here is that, through his resurrection, Jesus becomes the new Adam, i.e. he is the new representative of man and all of creation³³; henceforth we can no longer regard any human being (actually, any creature, cf. Col 1:15–20) purely empirically, since they are all mediated by the figure of Jesus. The ethical equivalent of this new view – and the only commandment that can still claim absolute validity – is therefore the statement: consider the person you encounter as though you were encountering Jesus (and thus the glory of YHWH).

The canon shows itself to be inspired by the Spirit insofar as it suspends self-referential subjectivity and opens itself to the name of YHWH, which is manifest in this suspension. Therefore, according to its own being, the canon must be open to new contexts, i.e. to what is Other with respect to itself. Jesus' cross, as the ultimate symbol of the Christian canon, must not become another dominant symbol of identity. Rather, Jesus reveals himself on the cross as the name of all names, in so far as he has not been misused as justification to wield power over others, but is instead transubstantiated into the empathic community of the vulnerable, which at the same time remains open to experiences of the alien and of decentering. Thus the canon not only bears the truth within itself, but also in the encounter with what is Other to it.

The Canonical Dimension of the Qur'an as Decentering the Canon

The canon's spiritual power consists primarily in the way it generates forms of reception (contexts) that make its own decentering possible. Its inner plurality is already evident in the fact that the canon exists in multiple forms: regarding the Old Testament, we can of course mention the Hebrew Tanakh (in its Masoretic form) and the Septuagint.³⁴ Furthermore, we should also mention four epochal

32 From a Christian point of view, in Jesus all names stand in this 'space between' proper names and YHWH. This not only applies to humans but to all living beings who have been given a name.

33 This concept of representation proceeds from the ontological presupposition that being is also Being-For (the Other) [*Dasein-Für (den Anderen)*].

34 Of course one could also point out here that the Gospel is in the form of four Gospels.

forms of world-encounter [*Weltbegegnung*], in whose symbolic orders the canon has been adjusted and carried forward: in two direct forms – namely in the Christian Church(es) and in Talmudic Judaism – and in two indirect forms: in the Qur'an³⁵ and in the modern, secular constitutional state.³⁶ While Christianity is gradually learning to respect the Jews as the first love of God (after centuries of the persecution of Judaism, and because of the catastrophe of Auschwitz), and while the Catholic Church (since the Second Vatican Council) and most Protestant churches can cautiously describe their relation to the secular constitutional state (and the secular philosophy it entails) in positive terms, Christianity has yet to demonstrate theological hospitality to Islam, and the Qur'an upon which it is based – either in spite of or because of the fact they too relate directly to Jesus.

The question, then, is: should Christianity recognize the Qur'an as a revealed, canonical scripture? There are two further connected questions here: 1. Why, in chronological terms, should there be yet another religion with a claim to revelation and a decisive impact upon history after Christianity, which received the incarnate Word of God in Jesus? 2. What significance would the Qur'an have for Christianity if it were recognized as a revealed scripture? Regarding the latter question, it is clear that if we understand the Qur'an as an authentic contextualization of the canon, it will have repercussions on the interpretation of the Bible. In responding to the latter question, one could perhaps proceed from the following observation: the Qur'an is the recited Word of God, i. e. the recitation

35 Muslim scholars have often charged Jews and Christians with falsifying the canon (Tahrif). For this charge they refer to passages in the Qur'an like 4:46 and 5:41. These passages, however, can be interpreted quite differently. All in all one must assume that in the Qur'an there was no doubt of the validity of the holy texts of Judaism and Christianity. Christians and Jews who combine the Qur'an with their own tradition, even get the double reward (Sura 28, verse 52–54). Cf. Abdullah Takim, *Koranexegese im 20. Jahrhundert. Islamische Tradition und neue Ansätze in Süleyman Ates's "Zeitgenössischem Korankommentar"* (Istanbul: Yeni Ufuklar, 2007). On the relationship of the Qur'an and the pre-Qur'anic tradition, cf. also Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

36 In the context of this article the author cannot go any further into the relationship between the canon and the modern constitutional state. The author would like to mention, however, that by no means should we use the term 'secular' as a counter-term to 'religious', but use it strictly in relation to the idea of free autonomy. Modern secularism has emerged in the confrontation with institutionalized Christian churches (and thus also in the recourse to ancient traditions), but this does not change the fact that one can draw the concept of personhood and the idea of universality from the biblical tradition. However this should not be taken as asserting any kind of monopoly on those concepts; the potential for institutionalizing human co-existence in such a way that takes the vulnerability of life into account – which we find in the great Asian religions, but also in the cultures of indigenous peoples and African cultures – is something that Christianity too must constantly re-discover.

by those who submit themselves to it (Islam) reveals Allah. This places the question of God at the center of the Qur'an, specifically the question of the unique, transcendent, and merciful God, the one we come to know from the first *sura* onwards. This confession of faith brings us right to the centre of the biblical canon, namely to Ex 34 and its confession of faith in "YHWH YHWH" as merciful God. For Christians, this turn to the unique God implies a request – which is also entailed by Judaism – regarding traditional interpretations of the Trinitarian confession of faith in God. In Christianity there is an all too facile tendency to interpret the unique name YHWH in a tritheistic manner, an all too facile tendency to transform the asymmetry between Jesus and the Father in the New Testament (cf. John 14:7) into a leveled and completely symmetrical relationship, so that the Father and Son become almost interchangeable. Christian theology cannot renounce its foundational dogmas (i. e. the Trinitarian confession of faith in God and the confession of faith in Jesus as "God-is") without being unfaithful to its own canon (e. g. Matt 28:19; John 20:28). The question, however, is whether or not an appreciative reception of Muslim revelation leads to a deeper understanding of the canon and thus to a deeper understanding of YHWH YHWH. Jesus is not merciful in the sense that his mercifulness is just one of his properties among others; rather he is the concrete expression of YHWH's mercifulness, which also occupies a central place in the recitation of the Qur'an. Jesus is not a second God, but is the 'God-is', i. e. the verbal performance of the name YHWH, which, as suggested in the context of Ex 34:6³⁷, goes far beyond being a mere representation of a supreme being. For Christians, Jesus is the unique reference to YHWH who is manifest in a concrete history, though Jesus' journey to the cross and his resurrection – in which the name YHWH is manifest – have a profound kenotic dimension. Therefore, like the tree of knowledge, Jesus is only in the center when he is simultaneously at the margin – which in turn sheds light on the relation of the Bible and the Qur'an, which are at the center and the margins of one another.

In the Qur'an, Jesus is the "Spirit of Allah" (Sura 4, verse 171) and he occupies a special position among men (virgin birth, ability to speak even as a baby, capability of creation etc.). It is specifically Jesus' emergence from Mary's womb that emphasizes his proximity to God's mercy, as the womb of Mary refers symbolically and semantically to divine mercy. In the reading that I propose in this article, the Holy Spirit – who expresses the fact that the canon is not an object of exegetical interest, but is rather a subject – must also express more than just the loving union of Father and Son. Specifically, it is the inspiration, first reader, and author of the canon, as well as its affective space; in this determination it can be brought into proximity with the Qur'an, the recited Word of God. The often-used juxtaposition of Jesus as God's Word made flesh and the Qur'an as God's Word 'made text' does not fully do justice to the fact that Jesus represents the incarnate

37 There we find the crucial statement: YHWH (is) YHWH, and divinity is only the first interpretation of this event.

word of God's *mercy*, as an interpretation of the name YHWH. Furthermore, the Qur'an is not simply God's Word in book form; it is rather the recitation of the divine word, i. e. its affective and sensory re-enactment (in this sense the affective horizon of the canon – indicated in the way to the cross – transforms itself into the voice of the believer).

The Qur'an is canonical insofar as it never expresses an objectifiable system of references – this is especially evident in those enigmatic signs that initiate 29 *suras* (including *sura* 2), and which resist every final reference; its purpose is to create a space of affective resonance through its recitation by a congregation, a space in which Allah can be sensorily effectual. Just as the (biblical) canon, through a Spirit-inspired reading (i. e. through the praxis of the succession), leads the believer to the divine name "YHWH YHWH", and radically transforms the symbolic order of the world (from *physis* to the sign), the liturgical re-enactment of the Qur'an, through its recitation, also signifies the transformation of the world into a resonating chamber of Allah's mercy.

Taking up these ideas, we return to the question concerning why a revelation after Christianity takes place. It is striking that, *first*, the Qur'an questions some of the theological one-sidedness of the Christian tradition, which in some cases has had some devastating effects: for instance, the emphasis on the image of Jesus as *pantocrator* (as the pinnacle of the Christian program of icons and imagery), which, although it can be truly understood in its subversive meaning, has nonetheless very easily turned into representations of exaggerated worldly and clerical powers. *Second*, one may perhaps also be able to affirm more fundamentally that *every* Christian representation must remain open to its Other, and therefore the canon, the cross and like Jesus himself.

Conclusion

Christian Political Theology is charged with the task of creating ironic reversals of power's self-representations, in order to create space for the encounter with the Other and to be able to encounter the vulnerable (and unrepresentable) core of life. Theology can become 'political' by doling out divine justifications and unshakable images of sovereignty. But in that case, the political reverts back to a mere appropriation of power. Indeed, in the Catholic tradition one can observe a unique aesthetic program, in which the Church presented itself. Everything is well-ordered and has aesthetic depth: from the church buildings to the cardinal classes up to the *cathedra Petri*. These representations can and must be subject to a permanent theological critique. But this critique should not enter into the completely abstract program of ridding ourselves of all representations, for such a radicalized negative theology would go hand in hand with the invisible omnipresence of power. The atheistic god and its 'imagelessness' [*Bildlosigkeit*] – which hides behind the virtual world today, which refers to 'nothing' – announces

an absolute power that no longer represents a nameable subject. Thus political theology must concern itself more with the ironic reversal and decentering of representations. Perhaps in this sense theology could contribute to establishing friendly relations among Christianity, Islam, and the secular world in the future, precisely because in the future they will be bound to one another by mutually taking up the task of decentering.

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